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ABSTRACT

As part of a pilot project sponsored by the Asian Pacific American Librarians Association, the needs assessment study described in this report set out to determine (1) the library and information needs of Asian Americans, and how they differ from the needs of the majority population, (2) whether these needs are being met, and (3) how librarians are preparing for the anticipated growth of these needs. To gather data, questionnaires were distributed to public library systems throughout the nation. It was found that newly arrived Asian immigrants need information about the fundamentals of daily life in the United States. Once past that transitional stage, they need information that will help them stay in touch with their heritage. Over half of the librarians participating in the survey, however, provide no special services for Asian Americans. Those that do provide services do so in a limited fashion. On the basis of the findings, it is recommended that the library community increase its awareness of the special library needs of Asian Americans, and that libraries and funding agencies provide financial support to meet these needs. Appended to the report are a sample questionnaire and tabulated data from completed questionnaires. (CMG)

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT STUDY OF LIBRARY INFORMATION SERVICE FOR ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN THE UNITED STATES[1]

Henry C. Chang and Suzine Har-Nicolescu[2]

This needs assessment study is part of a pilot project sponsored by the Asian Pacific American Librarians Association. The purpose of the study was to determine the library and information needs of Asian Americans, to determine if these needs differ from those of library users from the majority population, to determine whether or not these needs are being met, and to ascertain the plans of the library profession for meeting other needs of Asian Americans that may arise in the future. To gather data, questionnaires were distributed to library systems throughout the nation. On the basis of the findings, the report recommends that the library community increase its awareness of the special library needs of Asian Americans, and that libraries and funding agencies provide financial support to meet the needs of this group.

In recent years the number of persons immigrating to this country from Southeast Asia has increased significantly. Upon their arrival in the United States, most of these individuals experience severe culture shock and find themselves in desperate need of basic information that will enable them to survive and flourish. If these needs are to be satisfied, they must first be identified. This report is the result of one of the first assessement studies conducted on a nationwide basis to investigate the library and information service needs of Asian Americans.

This study was conceived in the spring of 1981 at a meeting of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science Cultural Minorities Task Force. The Task Force strongly endorsed the needs assessment study of Asian Americans and encouraged the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) to provide some financial support to make the study possible. Subsequently, the authors were commissioned to make a small pilot study. They reviewed research in the field and prepared a sample questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested and circulated for further refinement to Task Force members, officers of the Asian Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA) and to various experts in the field of library and information science throughout the country. The survey as it ultimately evolved had a multiple purpose: to identify the library and information service needs of Asian Americans, to determine how well librarians are currently addressing those

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needs, and to assess how they are preparing for the anticipated growth of those needs. The questionnaire was used to collect data to aid in achieving the goals of the study.

Method of Study

Ideally, a study such as this would best be directed toward the users of the services in question rather than toward the providers of those services. In this way the validity of the responses might be significantly enhanced. It is to be hoped that a more comprehensive investigation will be made from the point of view of actual and potential library users. The difficulties involved in isolating a sample group of users, of locating and contacting that group, and of designing a questionnaire that is relevant to a target group were more than could be surmounted with the funds, staff, and time available to the project investigators.

The investigators of this study decided to direct the questionnaire to the library and information service providers. The necessity for limiting the field to include only public libraries was soon apparent. The number of school libraries across the nation made impractical their inclusion in the study, for such vast numbers would make the sample unwieldy. Because of the specialized nature of the populations which such libraries normally serve, it was also felt that the inclusion of academic and private research libraries would tend to invalidate the results obtained.

The field was further narrowed by working only with states identified in the 1970 U.S. Census (the 1980 Census was not availble at the time the study was performed) as possessing an Asian American population of 2,000 or more. Once the participating states were selected, target libraries within those states were chosen based upon two broad assumptions: first, that libraries with sizeable collections and a large number of patrons are mostly likely to be found in major urban areas; and second, that the larger the population served by the library, the greater the proportion of Asian Americans likely to use the library's services. Bowker's American Library Directory was consulted, and the study ultimately focused upon 240 public libraries located in urban centers, housing more than 100,000 volumes in their collection, and serving more than 100,000 users.

An exception to the above was the inclusion of libraries in cities that research showed to have had a phenomenal growth in Asian American population within the last decade (e.g., Fort Lee or Englewood, New Jersey).

Considerable effort was devoted to maintaining a balance between the ratio of statewide Asian American population and the number of public libraries selected for the survey in that particular state. For example, if two libraries were selected in a state with an Asian American population of 2,000, then six or eight libraries were selected in a state with an Asian American population ranging from 8 to 10 thousand. Analysis of the data from the survey is primarily descriptive, with tables providing statistical summaries under each variable. Data was tabulated mostly in terms of percentage and frequency count. Because of the limited time and the unavailability of computer facilities, figures in this study were calculated manually.

Findings

Of the 240 library branches or systems receiving questionnaires, 151 responded (a response rate of approximately 60 percent). Only 5.3 percent of the respondents indicated having conducted their own assessment studies to determine the library and information service needs of Asian Americans in their area. In most cases, it is unlikely that the failure to conduct such studies stems from a deliberate disregard for, or lack of interest in, the information needs of Asian Americans. Such callousness would be antithetical to the professional aims of any reasonably dedicated library professional.

It is more likely that those who failed to conduct assessment studies did so as a result of a determination on their part that the Asian Americans make up a negligible proportion in their service area. In fact, 81.4 percent of those participating in the survey reported demands for special services on the part of Asian Americans ranged from "small" to "moderate," while only 6.3 percent characterized the demand in their area as "large or great." It is easy to deduce from an apparent lack of demand a corresponding lack of need, and conclude that a needs assessment was unnecessary. It is much more difficult--but ultimately more rewarding--to dig deeper, to try to discern why people are not making their needs known. One of the main factors contributing to the difficulty of carrying out such investigations at the local level is a lack of the funds necessary to do the job. Clearly, the majority of public libraries must rely on large, nationwide organizations to conduct relevant needs assessment and similar studies.

Even without the insights obtainable from a formal needs assessment study, the respondents showed an awareness of many of the important library and information service needs of Asian Americans. They pointed out the Asian Americans' need for aid and assistance with the fundamentals of daily life in America: health services, career counseling, citizenship study, etc. (39.1 percent); the need for assistance in the areas of continuing education, English language instruction, and similar

tutorial or remedial education programs (27.8 percent); and the necessity of assisting Asian Americans in adjusting to American life by developing and promoting various community activities in conjunction with local social or cultural community groups (24.5 percent). The last need suggests that librarians must recognize the effectiveness of outreach programs as a means of enhancing and enriching communications between librarians and the communities they serve.

A smaller percentage of those surveyed (18.5 percent) felt it important to increase the self-esteem of Asian American minority members by supplying them with information related to historical and current events that emphasize Asian Americans' contributions to the American way of life. Some respondents (17.2 percent) discerned two specific and pragmatic areas of need: programs for skills development and job training to increase employment opportunities, and the daily and ongoing provision of adequate Asian American-oriented reference and recreational library materials.

The identification of needs is only the first step in satisfying them. A significant number of the respondents have not progressed beyond that preliminary step, and report no special services to Asian Americans. Nearly ninety percent devote two percent or less of their total operating budget to the needs of Asian Americans. A distressing twenty percent have no materials which could be considered important for Asian Americans. Virtually none of the respondents have an Asian American serving on a library advisory board of any type, while only a slightly larger number (22.2 percent) employ a staff member specifically designated to serve minority library users, least of all Asian Americans. While these findings are disturbing, the second is a serious flaw. Staff members with varied responsibilities usually have neither time nor opportunity to familiarize themselves with the unique cultural backgrounds and information needs of potential minority patrons. This results in less than satisfactory service to such groups, and, in turn, frequently causes them to spurn the library as a source of information and assistance. In fact, the picture that these statistics present--almost total neglect of the information needs of Asian Americans in terms of budget, collection, programs, and staff on the part of nearly half of the libraries participating in this survey--is more than enough to turn all potential Asian American library users away from the libraries' doors. And that is precisely what library and information service providers who are determined to serve all citizens equally must strive to prevent.

It must be stressed that in most cases this neglect is not intentional; rather, it is the result of circumstances that are, or are perceived to be, beyond the control of the frequently frustrated librarians. Almost one fourth of the respondents complained of budgetary restrictions that prevent them from catering to the needs of Asian

Americans, while a lesser number (16.6 percent) mentioned the scarcity of source materials or selection tools to aid them in locating and purchasing materials pertinent to these needs. These are indeed obstacles formidable enough to frustrate even the most dedicated library professional.

But some of the barriers to fulfilling the information needs of Asian Americans mentioned by respondents might easily be surmounted with a little extra effort, or rechanneling of existing resources, on the part of the library and information service provider. For instance, 10.6 percent of those surveyed identified the highest cause of insufficient service as "lack of awareness of the availability of services" on the part of the Asian American community. In this case, it is up to library professionals to raise the consciousness of the Asian American members of their user population with regard to the services available. This can be accomplished in several ways--from the production and distribution of informative brochures, to giving casual talks at local schools, churches, and civic organizations. Indeed, the options available to promoting their wares are limited only by the extent of the ingenuity of the library workers themselves. Improper assessment of needs and the unwillingness of potential patrons to use library services were frequently cited problems for which viable solutions might easily be found by thoughtful and concerned library and information service professionals.

Among those survey participants who make an effort to satisfy the library and information needs of minorities as a whole, only 4.2 percent indicated that Asian Americans were their priority. Blacks were indicated as a priority by 50.4 percent of those responding, while 31.2 percent gave Hispanics the top slot. In terms of the second slot, Asian Americans still fared poorly, with Hispanics being the most frequently reported at 42.9 percent, and Blacks following with 21 percent. For approximately 85 percent of the respondents, these priorities are directly correlated to the relative population sizes of the various minority groups in their service areas. All available statistical information seems to support this correlation. Again, the sharp increase in Asian American population in the United States today strongly suggests that these priorities will shift.

Findings show further that 38.4 percent of the respondents are actively engaged in providing special library and information services for Asian Americans, and that almost half of the entire sample group reported holding material in one or more Asian languages. In view of the results of this survey, it is not overly pessimistic to assume that what is actually meant in many of these cases is Asian language materials of the most rudimentary nature, such as foreign language dictionaries. Unfortunately, an Asian American library user is likely to require specific information rather than a knowledge of how to ask the location of

the nearest restroom. What are these library and information service providers doing to meet the Asian Americans' information needs? Libraries are providing English language instruction and materials (67.2 percent); they are providing "general library materials in English and native languages" (43.1 percent); they are assisting Asian American patrons in adjusting to their new environment; and they are making audiovisual materials and equipment available for educational and recreational purposes. These responses seem to indicate that many of the survey participants underestimate the degree to which the library and information service needs of Asian Americans may differ from those of the community as a whole.

Most of the respondents mentioned their attempts to improve service to Asian Americans through shared resources and interlibrary loan networks. Unfortunately, such networks may be less effective than imagined, for the majority of libraries likely to be involved in such networks have few Asian American materials in their collections. Thus, if care is not taken to establish at least one relatively comprehensive core collection within the network, nothing more might be accomplished than the combination of many inadequate resources and the resulting creation of one sizeable, but largely inadequate, resource.

Without adequate funding, no special programs can be developed or special services offered. In view of the fact that fewer than one fourth of the respondents earmarked funds for fulfilling the information needs of Asian Americans, and that in the majority of those cases (80.6 percent) such funds represent a meager two percent or less of the total operating budget, it is hardly surprising that the library and information services currently being provided for Asian American minority members are insufficient.

Clearly, funding for special library service to Asian Americans must be increased. When asked how much additional annual funding they would require to improve significantly their service to Asian American patrons, most of the respondents estimated a figure of approximately $3,500, with some citing figures exceeding $10,000. For the majority of the respondents, these estimates represent only a two percent or less increase over their present annual budgets. These expenditures are not unreasonable when one considers the substantial benefits that might be gained.

Nearly 80 percent of the respondents stated that among the benefits which they would reap would be the enhancement of their collections of Asian American materials to levels approaching adequacy.

Hiring bilingual staff members and organizing various types of outreach programs were the next most frequently reported priorities for utilizing additional funds. It is hoped that such additional funds

(hypothetical within the framework of this survey) will reach the hands of those library and information service providers who need them. As approximately 55 percent of the respondents were able to foresee, there will undoubtedly be at least a "moderate" increase in the Asian American population, and therefore an increase in the need for special library and information services on the part of recently immigrated Asian Americans. (see Appendix 1-B) Aware of this projected increase, many of those surveyed discussed the areas they intend to explore in their attempts to respond to it. One third of them vowed to commit more effort to interacting with the Asian American community through various outreach programs, closely monitoring the feedback received thereby, and continually adjusting their programs accordingly. Another third pointed out the need to develop and to increase their Asian American collections either through existing interlibrary loan networks or through new and stronger networks created specifically to meet the information needs of Asian Americans. Almost one fourth of the respondents took a more general, long-range view of their responsibilities for the future, casting themselves in the role of potential advocate or catalyst in the development of pride in the Asian American community and in respect for their mixed heritage.

A smaller percentage of the respondents cited a need for additional study and research to identify and define the information requirements of Asian Americans, while some looked toward library orientation programs as the key to successful utilization of library resources on the part of Asian Americans in the future.

Summary and Conclusions

What conclusions can be drawn from the wealth of statistical data assembled in this report? There are several. First, newly arrived Asian immigrants require assistance in very basic ways: English language instruction, education and employment counseling, agency referral, and a multitude of informational aids to ease the transition into a completely new way of life. Next, those Asian Americans who have successfully made that transition need library materials written in their native languages to allow them to keep in touch with their past, their heritage, and their families. They must also be provided with materials that will immediately strengthen pride in their heritage and support their interest in keeping their unique cultural heritage alive. At the same time, these materials must promote an active interst in the ways and cultures of the pluralistic society in America.

On the basis of the results presented here, it seems safe to say that most library systems are at least vaguely aware of the Asian Americans' needs. Those few that are attempting to address such needs

are doing so in ways that are appropriate, yet limited: they are trying to improve collections of Asian American materials; they are establishing programs to reach out to the Asian American community; they are trying to make potential Asian American patrons aware of the library services that are available to them; and they are cognizant of the importance of having Asian American library workers on their staffs. But they are frequently hampered in their efforts, either by inadequate funding or by the difficulty of procuring suitable Asian American materials. All too frequently their efforts are simply not as great as the situation warrants.

It is distressing that over half of those participating in this survey provide no special services to meet the information needs of Asian Americans. There is one overriding reason for this: the Asian American population in many service areas is often not large enough or vocal enough to impress upon library administrators the need to expend sizeable amounts of money to address its information needs. This is especially true during the present period of fiscal constraints. Moreover, some cultural minority groups are often seen as more deserving of special attention simply by virtue of their numbers.

The Asian American population in many regions may be relatively small, but it is growing. It will continue to do so. Thus, continuing efforts must be made to increase the awareness of library and information service providers of the needs of their Asian American patrons, to pinpoint even further and with greater specificity what those needs are (a study such as this one needs to be made from the point of view of the potential Asian American library user to determine how well such individuals think our nation's libraries are meeting their needs), and to implement programs designed to meet those needs as effectively and as economically as possible.

Notes

1. This study was made possible by a small research grant from NCLIS, and was prepared under the auspices of APALA.

2. The authors acknowledge the enormous contribution made to this effort by Dr. V.T. Alexander in computing the data, by Michael Mandel, Ruby O. Woods Robinson, and Craig Strasshofer, and by the advice and support freely offered by the members of the NCLIS Task Force on Cultural Minorities. Further thanks are due to all who participated in the survey, particularly the 151 respondents who took the time to contribute their thoughts and ideas. Without the invaluable assistance of the above individuals, this report would not have been possible.

APPENDIX A - SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

If this questionnaire is received by a library system, the one copy may be completed to represent all libraries in the system. It would be pertinent however for the questionnaire to be duplicated, and sent to any or all applicable branches, as well as being filled out by a representative of the library system. If you have any additional questions regarding the questionnaire, please feel free to call Dr. Suzine Har-Nicolescu, at (212)735-1812, or Dr. Henry C. Chang, at (809)773-5715.

Please indicate whether this questionnaire is being completed by a representative of a library:

____a. System or ____b. Branch

Please answer all of the following questions as comprehensively as possible. Again, all responses will be anonymous, and no person or library system will be mentioned by name in the findings. Also, please remember to remit the questionnaire regardless of its applicability to your library (system), and keep in mind that our deadline for receiving the completed questionnaire is June 15, 1981. Your prompt completion of the questionnaire will be greatly appreciated.

1) Has your library (system) conducted a needs assesment survey of the Asian Americans in your community in recent years?

____yes ____no

*If "yes", please remit a copy along with the completed questionnaire.

2) Do you have any Asian Americans currently serving on your Library Board, or on any Advisory Board to the library?

____yes ____no

3) How would you rate the demand by Asian Americans in your community, for library and information services? (Please circle one)

a. No demand b. Small demand c. Moderate demand

d. Large demand e. Great demand

4) How would you rate the discrepency, if any, between these demands and the services provided by your library (system)?

a. No discrepancy b. Small discrepancy

c. Moderate discrepancy d. Large discrepancy

e. Great discrepancy

5) On a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being "most important", and 6 "least important", rank numerically, in order of importance, the causes of this discrepency:

____ a. No discrepancy

____ b. Budgetary restrictions

____ c. Lack of knowledge that services are available

____ d. Unwillingness of potential patrons to use library services

____ e. Remoteness of services

____ f. Improper assesment of needs

____ g. Other: _____

6) Does your library (system) provide any special services to Asian Americans?

____yes ____no

7) If "yes", please briefly describe:

8) Approximately what percentage of your library (system's) total operating budget is specifically earmarked for providing services to Asian Americans?

_____ % of total operating budget

9) In terms of this percentage, please rank numerically in order of priority, the services that your library (system) provides to Asian Americans, as compared to services provided to other large minority groups:

_____ a. American Indians

_____ b. Asian Americans

_____ c. Black

_____ d. Hispanic

_____ e. Other: _____

10) Do these priorities reflect the relative population size of each minority group within your library system?

If "no", please explain why:

11) Approximately what percentage of your library (system's) total collection does the Asian American collection comprise?

_____ % of total collection

12) Does your library (system) retain a staff, or staff member specifically hired to assist minority patrons, including Asian Americans?

____yes ____no

13) Does your library system cooperate in any way with other libraries or systems in providing services for Asian Americans?

____yes ____no

14) Does your library (system) presently possess any books, newspapers, and/or periodicals that are bilingual in any of the Asian Languages?

____yes ____no

15) If "yes", please briefly describe:

16) In your opinion, how important are (A), Asian American services and programs, and (B), the building of Asian American collections in your library (system's) future?

(A) Asian American services and programs:

a) of no importance b) of small importance c) of moderate importance

d) of large importance e) of great importance

(B) Asian American Collections:

a) of no importance b) of small importance c) of moderate importance

d) of large importance e) of great importance

17) Do you forsee an increase in the need for provision of library and information services to Asian Americans in the future?

a) no increase b) small increase c) moderate increase

d) large increase e) great increase

18) If funds were made available specifically for use in creating or expanding library and information services for Asian Americans, briefly describe the programs to which you would dedicate these funds (e.g. - collection development, bilingual staff, outreach programs, lifelong learning, etc.):

19) Approximately how much money do you feel your library (system) would need annually to implement these programs?

$_____

20) Approximately what percentage increase would this amount reflect in your total annual operating budget?

_____ % increase in total annual operating budget.

21) Describe what you feel are the special library and information needs of Asian Americans in your community:

22) Describe what you feel librarians should be doing to better meet the library and information needs of Asian Americans:

Thank you for your time and cooperation!

APPENDIX B - TABLES

Question #3: How would you rate the demand by Asian Americans in you community, for library and information services?

degree of demand	number of respondents	percentage of sample
no demand	21	13.9%
small demand	79	52.3%
moderate demand	44	29.1%
large demand	5	3.3%
great demand	1	0.7%
no answer	1	0.7%
TOTAL	151	100%

Question #4: How would you rate the discrepancy, if any, between these demands and the services provided by your library (system)?

degree of discrepancy	number of respondents	percentage of sample
no discrepancy	68	45.0%
small discrepancy	53	35.1%
moderate discrepancy	23	15.2%
large discrepancy	5	3.3%
great discrepancy	1	0.7%
no answer	1	0.7%
TOTAL	151	100%

tables (cont.)

Question #8: Approximately what percentage of you library (system)'s total operating budget is specifically earmarked for providing services to Asian Americans?

percentage of total budget	number of respondents	percentage of sample
0%	72	47.7%
0% - 2%	25	16.6%
3% - 4%	1	0.6%
5% - 6%	0	0.0%
7% - 8%	0	0.0%
9% - 10%	5	3.3%
no answer	48	31.8%
TOTAL	151	100%

Question #11: Approximately what percentage of your library (system)'s total collection does the Asian American collection comprise?

percentage of collection	number of respondents	percentage of sample
0%	30	20.0%
0% - 2%	67	44.7%
3% - 4%	6	4.0%
5% - 6%	2	1.3%
7% - 8%	0	0.0%
9% - 10%	0	0.0%
no answer	46	30.0%
TOTAL	151	100%

Tables (cont.)

Question #16: In your opinion, how important are (A) Asian American programs and services, and (B) the building of Asian American collection, in your library (system)'s future?

How important are		number of respondents	percentage of sample
(A) PROGRAMS & SERVICES	no importance	23	15.2%
	small importance	71	47.1%
	moderate importance	44	29.1%
	large importance	7	4.6%
	great importance	3	2.0%
	no answer	3	2.0%
	TOTAL	151	100%
(B) COLLECTIONS	no importance	22	14.6%
	small importance	61	40.4%
	moderate importance	53	35.1%
	large importance	7	4.6%
	great importance	2	1.3%
	no answer	6	4.0%
	TOTAL	151	100%

tables (cont.)

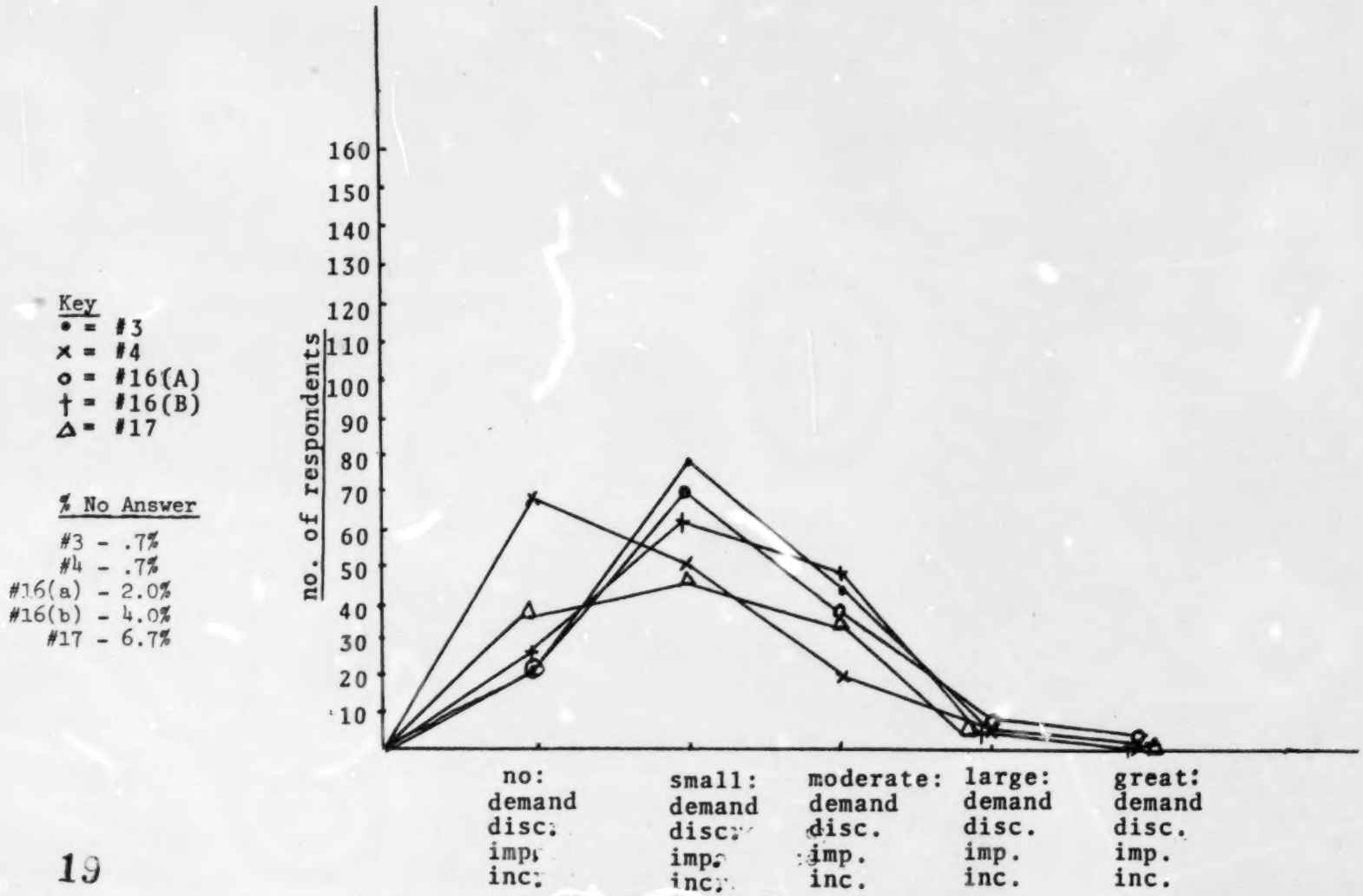
Question #17: Do you foresee an increase in the need for provision of library and information services to Asian Americans in the future?

degree of increase	number of respondents	percentage of sample
no increase	39	26.0%
small increase	52	34.6%
moderate increase	42	28.0%
large increase	6	4.0%
great increase	1	0.7%
no answer	11	6.7%
TOTAL	151	100%

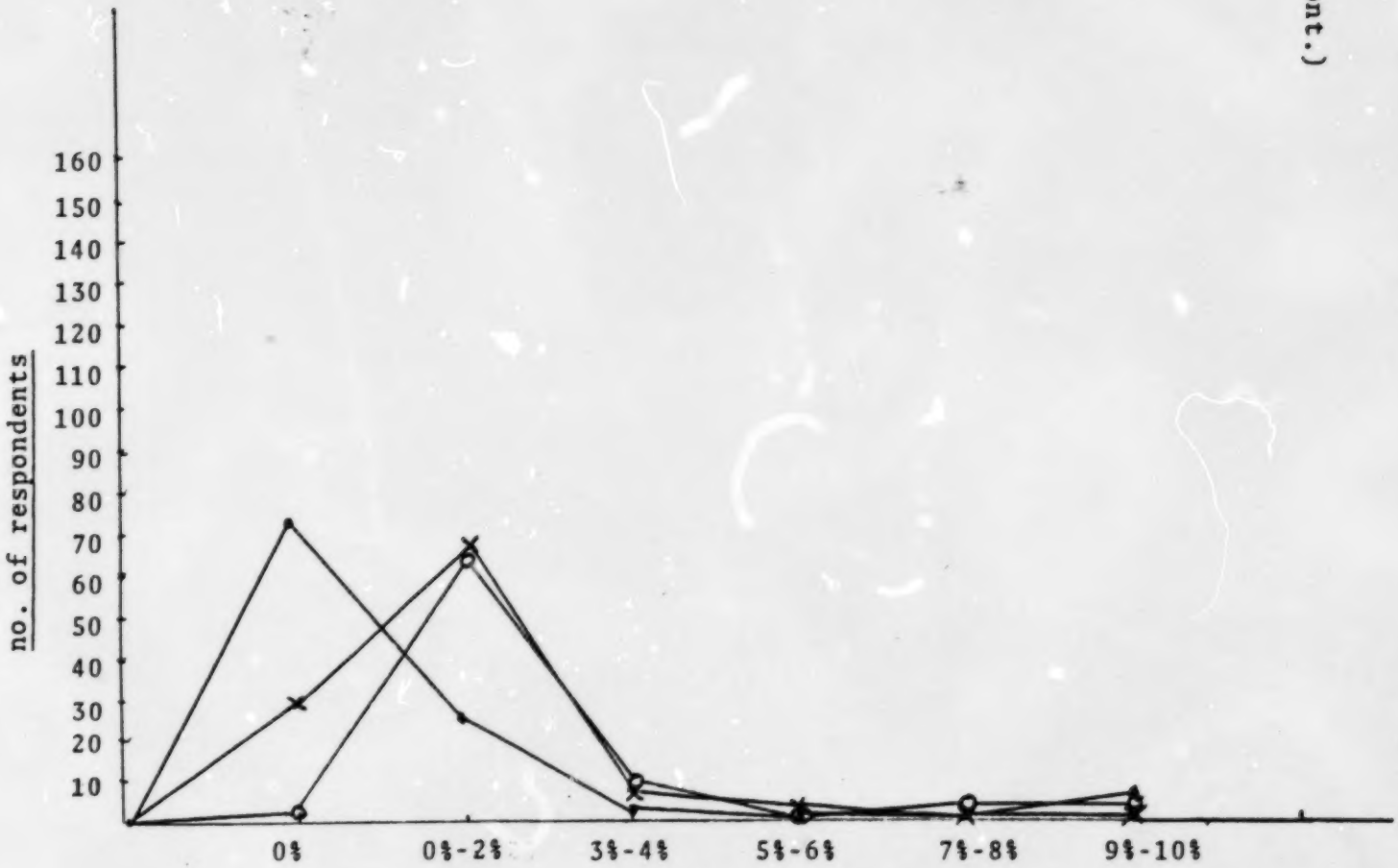
Question #20: (Given additional funds specifically for enhancing service to Asian Americans), approximately what percentage increase would such an amount reflect in your total annual operating budget?

percentage of total budget	number of respondents	percentage of sample
0%	1	0.7%
0% - 2%	65	43.5%
3% - 4%	9	6.1%
5% - 6%	1	0.7%
7% - 8%	2	1.4%
9% - 10%	5	3.4%
no answer	68	44.2%
TOTAL	151	100%

Questions with variables of degree



Questions with variables of percentage



Key
• = #8
× = #11
○ = #20

% No Answer

#8 - 31.8%
#11 - 30.0%
#20 - 44.2%

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